

Book Reviews

Linda Rhodes, *Two for the Price of One. The Lives of Mining Wives*. API Network in association with Curtin University of Technology and the *Journal of Australian Studies*, Perth, 2005. 304pp. Price: Pbk Aus\$33.20.

Mining wives, according to the author, is the term used in the metal mining sector to denote the wives of professional and managerial staff, and is the label accepted and appropriated by the wives to describe themselves [p.65]. These mining professionals, until recently almost without exception males, are geologists, metallurgists and mining engineers, a number of whose careers take them into mine management. It is on this group of staff wives, not on all wives whose husbands work in the mining industry, that this monograph focuses.

Two for the Price of One is an insider's view of the lives of these wives, Linda Rhodes stating in her Prologue that she became a mining wife when she married a metallurgist in 1972 and followed him to live in a succession of mining towns. The study benefits from her contacts with other wives in similar situations to herself and, more importantly, from the empathy she feels for the experiences of this group of women. Rhodes is passionate about the unfairness of the mining industry's treatment of the wives: its neglect of their needs as individuals, wives and mothers; its acceptance without acknowledgement or recompense of their contributions to the industry; and its often brutal disregard for the family responsibilities of its professional employees.

This is a strongly feminist sociological study which argues that the wives of mining professionals have been and still are subordinated and marginalised by the industry's patriarchal attitudes and practices. It explores the various disabilities affecting these wives: their unpaid entertaining, secretarial and house work done in the company interest; their exclusion from full participation in the masculinist life of mining towns; the constant stress of residential relocations; the loss of their own career opportunities; and the major disruptions to family life (loss of children to boarding schools, husbands' frequent absences, and loss of friends with each change of residence). Rhodes argues that these women form part of two-person careers but the wife in the partnership remains unpaid and without status despite her significant contribution to her man's career. Hence her title *Two for the Price of One*.

The study's empirical data are interviews with the mining wives themselves. The author states that 70 interviews constitute her sample although, from the different given names used to identify interviewees, there appear to be 70 interviews with Generation 2 wives (those married 1960–85), 20 with Generation 1 wives (those married prior to 1960) and another 20 with Generation 3 wives (those married after 1985), making 110 interviews in all. This concentration on Generation 2 wives, the group to which the author herself belongs, reflects the core focus of the study. The book is enriched by the interviewees' lively comments on their experiences, which are extensively quoted in the text. They make interesting reading. It is indeed a challenging task for any researcher to select and organise a large number of diverse individual opinions into an ordered analysis. In this analysis, it sometimes seems that the women's diverse subjectivities have not been allowed full voice; that the feminist reading of the data subordinates many of the women's alternate views. As well, the voices of Generations 1 & 3 tend to be drowned by those of Generation 2.

The book would have benefited from a more extensive discussion of research method, particularly the selection of the interview sample, the interview method, the preservation and lodgement of the interview recordings and, perhaps above all, any agreed conditions of interviewing. This reader assumes that the given names of interviewees are pseudonyms and that the agreed anonymity encompassed company names and locations. Was there also agreement that the interview questions would not range beyond certain specified subjects? Did the author try to seek out for interview divorced wives or wives whose husbands had decided to leave the mining industry? Such wives, presuming that they exist, are almost entirely unrepresented in the sample. An appendix (or an extended introduction) answering these questions would have been useful.

The study floats tantalising free of material context. For instance, it stands in stark contrast to Claire Williams' 1981 sociological monograph *Opencut. The working class in an Australian mining town*, which pictures a new coal mining town in the Bowen Basin as a rigidly hierarchical community where staff wives are privileged women in high-set, well-apportioned houses in contrast to the rest of the working families in low-set, small houses, and where class distinctions shaped town life to its detriment. One wonders about the privileges that attach to the position of staff wife and, perhaps above all, about professional mining men's remuneration packages, which

surely benefit the entire family and which might seem (to an outsider at least) to compensate substantially for the disabilities of being a mining wife.

Consideration of the social position of mining wives in Australian society suggests three levels at which subordination can occur. First, at the most general level, in industrial capitalist societies most homemakers' labour is unpaid, not only that of mining wives. And unpaid labour in our society is generally undervalued. Second, the mining industry may indeed take the work of mining wives for granted and ignore the family responsibilities of its professional staff, as this study argues quite convincingly (although one wonders whether all mining companies are equally culpable in this regard). Third, the private arena of spousal relations may be built on varying degrees of wifely subordination. This study appears to place all responsibility for mining wives' subordination on the second level — 'the patriarchal nature of the [mining] industry'. Even for such a tough and often ruthless industry, this seems an unfair burden.

Two for the Price of One is welcome in adding to the very small number of studies that look at mining wives and families. By exploring the to-date closed world of professional staff wives and utilising their voices in her text, Linda Rhodes has increased our understanding of Australian mining.

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David Johnson, *The Geology of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2005. 288 pp., 30 line diagrams, 83 colour plates, ISBN 0521 60100 2. Price: Pbk AUS\$69.95 (also available in Hbk).

I was asked to review this book for its suitability and interest to the general reader. I believe it is eminently suitable and I highly recommend it to all readers interested in the natural history of Australia. Being a geologist, I thought I might be biased towards a book on the geology of Australia, or perhaps too familiar with the subject matter and the geological terminology. So I asked my wife, Elizabeth (a devout non-expert in the field) if she would read it and give me her opinion. I am happy to report that she concurs with my assessment. She found the language clear and concise and was impressed by the thorough coverage and excellent illustrations. Particularly appealing to

her was the concept, proposed at the end of the book, of considering the present state of Australia as a point in a journey from the long geological past to the future.

The book essentially explains the formation of the Australian continent and its landscape over the past 4.4 billion years. It describes the dramatic changes in climate, environment and life forms that have occurred over this time and shows how geologists interpret these from the story preserved in the rocks. The reader can find out the origin of many of Australia's iconic features, such as Uluru, the Sydney Basin and Blue Mountains, the Eastern Highlands, the Outback plains and deserts, the famous beaches and coastline and the Great Barrier Reef, to name a few. The amazing changes from periods of warm tropical conditions to 'icehouse' and back again and the cycles of mountain building, volcanic activity, erosion and sedimentary deposition are described in an interesting and easy to follow format.

The first chapter sets the scene by briefly describing the main physical features, climate and geological characteristics of Australia. Chapter 2 is a 'Geological Primer' that introduces the main ideas of geology and explains the technical terms used in the book. It covers the basics on minerals, rocks, fossils, plate tectonics, internal and surface processes and the geological time scale. This should be very helpful to readers with little knowledge of geology. Most of the rest of the book is devoted to describing how the different parts of Australia were assembled, starting with the oldest bits and working forward to the present. For much of this time Australia did not exist as the entity we know today, but was part of larger supercontinents such as Rodinia and Gondwana that came together and broke up. At various times additions were made to the growing continental mass and shallow seas inundated the land. This is all well explained with the help of diagrams and clear descriptions of the latest geological thinking. Near the end of the book there is a chapter on the Earth in its planetary context, which includes information on the geology of our neighbours in the solar system, Australian meteorites, tektites and impact craters. The final chapter summarises the global wandering of the Australian land mass through geological time and the accompanying major events of the geological and climatic cycles.

Throughout the book selected topics are described in more detail in special 'boxes'. These are clearly indicated by lines down the left column. Some readers may find the information in these a little more technical but they usefully expand on interesting and uniquely Australian geological features or explain special methods and techniques used by geologists. Topics range from tsunamis to climate change and the

Burning Mountain at Wingin to gemstones in basalts. The book is well illustrated with many helpful summary diagrams. There are a few small niggling errors but these barely detract from what is a well-prepared and highly readable text.

The Geology of Australia contains a wealth of information that will fascinate the general reader. It provides an understanding for the natural features that we all see around us in this wonderful and unique continent. It would make ideal reading for anyone travelling around Australia. At \$69.95 it is good value for money.

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